

Subject: Yes on HB 2169

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Noble and Power, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Scott Smith. I live in Corvallis and work in Lane County.

I am writing in support of HB 2169 because there are steps we can take to bring our public safety systems further along toward equitable outcomes, and towards effectiveness. HB 2169 will contribute to reducing systemic racism by supporting restorative justice programming, reducing unnecessary deportations, and increasing police accountability. These are direct and achievable responses to the national and local demand for racial justice and an effective public safety system.

Surely others are speaking eloquently and expertly about the parts of the bill that address requirements for policing, and each of those is important. I will focus here on the potential benefits of increasing the availability of restorative justice processes in communities throughout the state. As the Restorative Justice Program Manager at the Center for Dialogue and Resolution (CDR), it is my privilege to manage a restorative justice diversion program for adult respondents, in partnership with the Lane County Circuit Court.

I would like to highlight here the community costs that occur when a person is convicted, sentenced, and possibly incarcerated, but which are avoided when that same person goes through a process of active accountability and making repair. Our program has within the last few months, for example, worked with several single parents whose children would have had to be placed elsewhere if this diversion were not available.

Instead of causing secondary and tertiary harmful effects, a restorative response frequently involves making restitution payment, securing behavioral and/or mental health treatment, keeping or getting new employment, and performing community service. All of these steps increase community health and strength. It is an approach that meaningfully responds to real harms, without the wasteful and long-term negative repercussions.

When a respondent is referred to our program by the court, they participate in honest conversations about their choices, the impacts of those choices, and their opportunities to make repair. Nationwide, victims surveyed after their case goes through a restorative process are much more likely to feel satisfied than victims whose case goes through a court process, and most studies indicate that there is a positive impact on recidivism as well.

Currently it is much more common, around Oregon and the US, to find restorative justice responses to criminal harms for juveniles than for adults. In Lane County, we are getting excellent results with our program for adults, and it would be a huge step for victims/survivors, for communities, and for the families of those who cause criminal harms, if this were to be more widely available throughout the state. The passage of this bill could make that a reality by designating funding for such programs.

Oregonians are eager for the development of public safety responses that create positive outcomes for victims, responsible parties and community health, that are efficient with public resources, and that lead to greater equity across our public safety systems. With HB 2169, we have the opportunity to significantly empower these changes.

Thank you for your time and attention to this crucial discussion.